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FEBRUARY 3, 2009

Senator Andrew Maynard, Co-Chair
Representative Ted Graziani, Co-Chair
Honorable Members
Connecticut Select Committee on Veterans Affairs
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06105

IN RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 119

Good morning Senator Maynard, Representative Graziani, and Honorable Members of the Connecticut Select Committee on Veterans Affairs. My name is Derek Eggerman and I am the Junior Enlisted-Air Guard Board Member of the National Guard Association of Connecticut. I live in Storrs-Mansfield and am a Staff Sergeant in the Connecticut Air National Guard. I am here today to testify on behalf of proposed Senate Bill No. 119, An Act Concerning Tuition Waivers for Veterans Taking Summer and Intersession Classes at Public Colleges and Universities.

I have been a member of the Connecticut Air National Guard for 10 years and graduated from the University of Connecticut with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications. As a traditional guardsman, I know first hand the difficulties in balancing a military life with ones' civilian and school life. Both are very demanding on ones' time. Having a full or part-time civilian job, a job in the guard, and going to school can be tough.

Besides being expensive, going to college takes years to complete. As the demands on our guard members to deploy for training and overseas missions increases, this time away can push completion of a collegiate program back years. In addition to being willing to deploy to protect our state and our nation, many guard members are also willing to give up their summers and winter holidays to try and catch up with their schooling programs. At this time, the schools won't allow this as they don't charge tuition for these classes. Instead they designate the tuition for these classes as a fee.

In general, student fees have been growing rapidly over the past several years. In some cases student fees have surpassed tuition as the largest expense for a student (not including room and board). We should make going to college as accessible to our National Guard members as we can, and as we have passed legislation as such already, we should finish the job. It is my opinion that all student fees for Connecticut National Guard members should be waived. Senate Bill 119 should seek to require the board of trustees of the regional community-technical colleges, the Connecticut State University System and The University of Connecticut to waive all student fees for all National Guardsmen currently serving the state.

Helping our states' guard members in obtaining a higher education benefits the members, their families, their communities, and the state as a whole. It helps not only to recruit new guardsmen, but also to retain them in our volunteer armed forces. Let us give our guard members the help they so richly deserve. I strongly support this bill and urge you to act favorably on Senate Bill 119. Please help close the loophole created by these schools who are designating class tuition as a student fee, truly waive the cost of school for Connecticut National Guard members, and make obtaining a college degree a truer reality for our men and women actively serving in uniform.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this committee and the people of the State of Connecticut.

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